



Sex and Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

All Erie County residents should stay home and minimize contact with others to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

Sex is a normal part of life and should always be with the consent of all parties. This document offers strategies to reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19 during sex. Decisions about sex and sexuality need to be balanced with personal and public health. During this extended public health emergency, people will and should have sex. Consider using harm reduction strategies to reduce the risk to yourself, your partners, and our community.

But can you have sex?

Yes! Here are some tips for how to enjoy safer sex and reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19.

1. Know how COVID-19 spreads.

- **You can get COVID-19 from a person who has it.**
 - The virus spreads through particles in the saliva, mucus or breath of people with COVID-19, even from people who do not have symptoms.
- **We still have a lot to learn about COVID-19 and sex.**
 - COVID-19 has been found in the semen and feces (poop) of people who are infected with the virus.
 - We do not know if COVID-19 can be spread through vaginal or anal sex.
 - We know that other coronaviruses do not easily spread through sex. This means sex is not likely a common way that COVID-19 spreads.

2. Have sex with people close to you.

- **You are your safest sex partner.** Masturbation will not spread COVID-19, especially if you wash your hands (and any sex toys) with soap and water for at least 20 seconds before and after sex.
- **The next safest partner is a consenting adult you live with.** Having close contact — including sex — with only a small circle of people helps prevent spreading COVID-19.
 - Have sex **only** with **consenting partners**.
- **You should limit close contact — including sex — with anyone outside your household.** If you do have sex with others outside of your household, have as few partners

as possible and pick partners you trust. Talk about COVID-19 risk factors, just as you would discuss PrEP, condoms, and other safer sex topics. Ask them about COVID-19 before you hook up.

- **Do they have symptoms or have they had symptoms in the last 14 days?** Most people with COVID-19 have symptoms, but asymptomatic spread is possible. Fever, cough, sore throat, and shortness of breath are symptoms to ask about. Note that asking about symptoms is not a perfect way to know whether someone has COVID-19.
 - **Have they been diagnosed with COVID-19 using a nasal swab or saliva test?** People who have recovered from COVID-19 at least 10 days from the day their symptoms started **and** who have not had fever for at least three days are likely no longer infectious.
 - **If two is company then three (or more) is definitely a crowd.** Large gatherings of any type are not safe during COVID-19. Close contact with multiple people should be avoided. But, if you decide to find a crowd, below are tips to reduce your risk of spreading or getting COVID-19:
 - Limit the size of your guest list. Keep it intimate.
 - Go with a consistent sex partner.
 - Pick larger, more open, and well-ventilated spaces.
 - Wear a [face covering](#), avoid kissing, and do not touch your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
 - Bring an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
 - **If you usually meet your sex partners online or make a living by having sex,** consider taking a break from in-person dates. Video dates, sexting, subscription-based fan platforms, sexy “Zoom parties” or chat rooms may be options for you.
 - **If you decide to have sex outside of your circle of contacts or a hook up:**
 - Closely monitor yourself for symptoms.
 - Consider getting a swab or saliva test for COVID-19 on a more frequent basis (monthly or within five to seven days of a hookup).
 - Take precautions interacting with people at risk for severe COVID-19 illness such as people over 65 years of age or those with serious medical conditions.
 - Be vigilant with face coverings and healthy hand hygiene to minimize risk to others.
 - **If you usually meet your sex partners online or make a living by having sex,** consider taking a break from in-person dates. Video dates, sexting or chat rooms may be options for you.
- 3. Having antibodies against the virus that causes COVID-19 or a prior positive diagnostic test do not mean definite immunity. Use test results with caution in helping you make decisions about sex.**

- A positive antibody test for the virus that causes COVID-19 may indicate prior exposure, but it does not mean you are immune from reinfection.
- A prior positive diagnostic test (nose swab or saliva) means you have had COVID-19 and may be less likely to be re-infected. We don't know how strong that protection is or for how long it lasts.
- **Be cautious in using these tests to make decisions about who you have sex with and what kind of sex you have since antibody test results are not definite proof of immunity.**

4. Take care during sex.

- **Kissing can easily pass COVID-19.** Avoid kissing anyone who is not part of your small circle of close contacts.
- **Rimming (mouth on anus) might spread COVID-19.** Virus in feces may enter your mouth and could lead to infection.
- **Wear a face covering or mask.** Maybe it's your thing, maybe it's not, but during COVID-19 wearing a face covering that covers your nose and mouth is a good way to add a layer of 3 protection during sex. Heavy breathing and panting can spread the virus further, and if you or your partner have COVID-19 and don't know it, a mask can help stop that spread.
- **Make it a little kinky.** Be creative with sexual positions and physical barriers, like walls, that allow sexual contact while preventing close face to face contact.
- **Masturbate together.** Use physical distance and face coverings to reduce the risk.
- **Condoms and dental dams can reduce contact with saliva, semen or feces** during oral or anal sex.
- **Washing up before and after sex is more important than ever.**
 - Wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
 - Wash sex toys with soap and warm water.
 - Disinfect keyboards and touch screens that you share with others.

5. Skip sex if you or your partner is not feeling well.

- **If you feel unwell**, or even start to feel unwell, avoid kissing, sex or any close contact with others.
- **If you have been exposed to someone with COVID-19**, avoid close contact with anyone outside your household and follow CDC guidance about how to prevent exposing others. People exposed to COVID-19 should get tested for the virus using a swab or saliva test.
- **If you or your partner has a medical condition that can lead to severe COVID-19 illness**, you may also want to skip sex.

- Medical conditions include lung disease, moderate to severe asthma, heart disease, diabetes, obesity, kidney disease, liver disease, cancer or a weakened immune system (for example, having unsuppressed HIV or a low CD4 count).

6. Prevent HIV, other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unintended pregnancy.

- **HIV:** Using condoms, taking pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and having an undetectable viral load all help prevent HIV.
- **Other STIs:** Using condoms helps prevent other STIs.
- **Pregnancy:** Make sure you have an effective form of birth control for the coming weeks. For HIV, STD, and pregnancy/family planning, visit <https://www.adagiohealth.org/Location-Adagio-Health-Erie>.

For the latest information, visit <https://eriecountypa.gov/what-you-should-know-about-covid-19/> or cdc.gov/covid19.

The Erie County Department of Health and Pennsylvania Department of Health may change recommendations as the situation evolves.

*This guidance has been adapted from the NYC Health Department.
<https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/imm/covid-sex-guidance.pdf>